Envoys to Visit J&K Again

Why in News?

The Indian Government has decided to take a second batch of foreign envoys to visit Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

Why this decision is significant?

- In January 2020, 15 foreign diplomats, including US Ambassador to India, were taken to Kashmir by Indian Government.
- The Ministry of External Affairs stated that these tours will become a regular feature pointing to a belief that these visits have been productive.
- The government has been under considerable international pressure to lift restrictions in the former State of J&K.
- But still, it has managed to arrange these visits without any incident.
- The delegations have been taken to meet with local groups, and shown a glimpse of 'normalcy' in the Kashmir Valley.

What was the result of the previous visits?

- After these tours, no envoy has come forward with any negative account.
- This indicates that at least for the moment, the government's narrative has prevailed. The visits have also smoothed other diplomatic exchanges.
- The U.S. Ambassador's trip in the first batch to J&K paved the way for the upcoming visit of their President.

How the previous visit was timed?

- The latest visit by European Ambassadors was timed just before Indian Foreign Minister travel to Brussels to prepare for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trip for the EU-India summit in March 2020.
- However, the government must recognise that these gains in the present are superficial in the absence of change in Kashmir's situation.

What is concern with the meeting?

- It would not have escaped anyone's attention that,
    1. These tours are tightly controlled, and
    2. The people meeting the foreign guests are handpicked by the

government.

- European delegates who accepted India's invitation on this trip had earlier opted out in order to request freer access and meetings with leaders in detention.
- But the government refused to relent to this request.
- The chimera of 'normalcy' seems patently fragile.

What should be the priority?

- The truth is managing India's image is important. But the government's primary responsibilities still lie within its borders.
- These responsibilities may include the responsibilities,
    1. To the people of J&K, who have yet to see a return to normalcy;
    2. To those detained in and outside J&K; and
    3. To the people of India as a whole, who are yet to see a credible path to the peace and prosperity that was promised when the momentous decision on Article 370 was announced last August.
- It is their legitimate expectations and not those of the international community that must be a priority for the government.

Source: The Hindu

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